

The GOP's jeers at the budget President Obama unveiled today — House Speaker John Boehner, tweaking the new White House slogan, scoffed that Obama was "spending the future" — highlight the vast gap between the two parties' budget blueprints. But the chasm is likely to grow wider. Boehner's promise to preside over an open amendment-process on the House floor will be tested when the chamber begins debating an Appropriations Committee spending bill that would slash \$100 billion in funding between now and Sept. 30, the end of the fiscal year on. As Jay noted in her round-up this morning, rank-and-file members are likely to offer scores of amendments that will drive the tally of cuts ever higher. To freshman deficit hawks, the \$100 billion in cuts is a baseline figure, not a target. "\$100 billion is a piece of cake," Iowa Republican Steve King told the Hill. **"The grand total isn't sufficient for me," said Rep. John Campbell of California.**

Ornery freshmen forced Boehner last week to instruct Appropriations Committee chair Hal Rogers to find cuts that meet the \$100 billion figure cited in the GOP Pledge to America. While it's been portrayed as a mass-scale insurrection against leadership, Boehner got out ahead of the discontent by calling a meeting on Thursday afternoon to address the freshman class. "He said I hear you, and we're with you," says Republican freshman James Lankford of Oklahoma. The next day, at CPAC, Boehner said of the \$100 billion benchmark: "We're not going to stop there. Once we cut the discretionary accounts, then we'll get into the mandatory spending. And then you'll see more cuts." (Read "Budget Day and the Environment: Obama's Proposed EPA Cuts.")

The baseline figure alone has no chance of passing the Democratic-controlled Senate. But the freshman class, unlike Boehner, have the luxury of tossing out figures without regard to the difficulties of shepherding a critical bill across the line. Their success at shifting leadership's stance so far may spur them to push even harder. Those who interpret the Republican wave of 2010 as a mandate to slash programs on a historic scale are embracing painful cuts. "It saddens me that I'm sitting in rooms arguing about cutting \$10 million off this food program and \$20 million off that electricity program," says freshman Rep. Joe Walsh, a Republican from Chicago's northwest suburbs. "Nibbling around the edges" is unacceptable, he says. "We should be talking about bigger things." (Comment on this story.)

The cuts Republicans propose are hardly nibbles. They would inflict funding cuts across the board, in fields ranging from education and transportation to scientific research and community policing. Members know this. They've pulled out the hatchets anyway. "The issue is not whether they're good programs," says Lankford. "They're good programs. The issue is we're broke."

